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# Food and Nutrition

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Special School Lunch Issue



School lunch  
"from top to bottom"

Why training is important

The people behind  
the program

How can we get  
kids to eat?

Involving the community

30 years—a proud record





On the 30th anniversary of the National School Lunch Program, this special issue of **FOOD AND NUTRITION** focuses on the people who make the program work. Who are they? What do they do? And where are they going? To answer these questions, the issue takes a look at the “big picture”—the school lunch program from top to bottom.

Some stories on training, for instance, shed light on the complexities and demands of the cafeteria manager’s job. Other articles take a look at Federal, State, and local school lunch people—what they do, and how they work together.

This issue also explores some of the big problems facing school food service people today, such as plate waste and low participation. How serious are these problems? And what are some solutions?

The National School Lunch Program has undergone many changes in its 30-year history. And some of those changes are described in a feature about a woman who has worked with school lunch for more than 30 years. She’s an outstanding woman, and she’s typical of the thousands of dedicated people who, working together, provide lunch to more than 26 million children every school day.

The issue concludes with a section on school lunch and the community. A city director explains why community support is essential to a successful program, and several stories show how food service staffs are involving students, parents and others in their efforts to build better programs.

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*By Dianne D. Jenkins*

The night is black and cold and the sun is still a good 2 hours away. A few houselights flicker on; then headlights begin to weave their way through silent city streets and down empty country roads. Building lights snap on, casting long patches of light and shadow across the playground. The school kitchen is empty and very quiet.

Voices and the sounds of people slowly fill the room: spoons softly clinking against metal bowls, the click clack of racks crossing tiled floors, and the smack of a refrigerator door elbowed shut.

As the smell of baking cookies starts to penetrate the kitchen, the pace quickens. Vegetables are chopped; french fries are cut; rolls are split. The baker whips around the corner swinging a tray of steaming breads. A hot oven snaps open, and the smell of baking chicken is everywhere. With a sudden clank and whir, a grater turns pounds of carrots into mounds of salad topping. And the pace grows faster.

The room is alive with sounds and voices, flashing hands, cutting, shaping, pulling. They are moved by a sense of urgency. But like musicians, they are well-

orchestrated, working in unison.

Gradually the pace slackens. The clutter of sounds recedes as spoons, beaters, pots and trays are put down, put away. Gently, the pieces drop into place, revealing a colorful, aromatic prize: bright steaming vegetables, hot breads, juicy meats.

Silence falls. The servers on the line are waiting. Count to ten, and the cafeteria door explodes, releasing a steady flow of hungry children, pushing, shoving, then settling, finding their places in line. The cafeteria fills with faces, and hundreds of children are eating a very good meal.

**E**very day of the school year, this scene is acted out by over 300,000 school food service workers in the more than 85,000 schools across the country which participate in the National School Lunch Program. This year, as the program celebrates its 30th anniversary, 90 percent of all the children in the United States have access to nutritious, reasonably-priced meals at school. That's a lot of kids—almost 26 million. And that's a lot of meals—over 4 billion. School lunch is big business.

Having 26 million children in for lunch every day is indeed a big job—one that requires the cooperation and dedication of school food service workers, district food service directors, State school food service people and Federal people in Washington and the field.

But the effectiveness of the National School Lunch Program depends, most of all, on the efforts of the women and men in school cafeterias—school food service workers. As one cafeteria manager said, "It's the love in the soup that makes it work."

#### **The individual is the key**

"The individual is really the key to the success of this program," according to Josephine Martin, president of the American School Food Service Association and administrator of Georgia's school food service programs. "One individual who doesn't care can put too much salt in the pot of peas, and out it goes. One individual who doesn't care can cook the broccoli too long, and instead of bright crisp green, it turns out mushy and yellow. One individual who doesn't care can fail to read instructions on the cake box and end up with a flat soggy mess," she explained. "The manager can buy the highest quality food, but success depends on the way it is lovingly handled

by people who know they are doing something important."

Whether a person fixes food, serves food, collects money, or cleans and washes, that person and that job are important. "We're all members of a team," Ms. Martin said, "and it's terribly important for us all to take responsibility for the success or failure of this program."

Jerry Boling, manager of the child nutrition programs for the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), echoed Ms. Martin's thoughts with almost exactly the same words, then added: "People are the only thing that really matters. And that's what makes this job worth doing; the people we work with and the children we're working for."

#### **Manager plays important role**

The success of a school's lunch program depends, in many ways, on the cafeteria manager. The manager's job is a complex one, requiring diverse skills and training to do it right.

As Jo Martin sees it, a manager really has a four-fold responsibility: to serve high quality meals, to provide an attractive setting, to be an efficient and effective manager and run a financially sound program, and to facilitate nutrition education.

"The definition of a manager," said Ms. Martin, "is one who knows what needs to be done, how it is to be done, when it is to be done, and just who is going to do it."

"Frequently," she continued, "the manager doesn't see her role from a broad enough point of view. The manager is not just a food preparer or server, and once she starts to assume that job, it's difficult for her to stay on top of the operation." While few managers can afford to just "manage," Ms. Martin admitted, management needs to be the focus of the job.

#### **Isolation sometimes a problem**

A big problem for cafeteria managers and their assistants, according to Ms. Martin, is that they frequently feel isolated and thrust outside the flow of the education system.

"We tend to think ourselves into that position too. We need to remind ourselves that we are indeed an integral part of the whole education cycle," she said. With nutrition education, for instance: "Managers need to make the food service departments available to instructors as a nutrition education laboratory. Food service people are a resource for teachers and can also put teachers in touch with a variety of nutrition education materials."

#### **Need for training**

In line with this, Ms. Martin sees the need for school food service workers to get additional training, to upgrade their skills and qualifications.

"This should include everyone—cooks, salad makers, cashiers, short order lines, food service managers, and food service directors. When we have no specific qualifications established for these jobs, it undermines the way we see ourselves and the way others see us," she contended.

One of the biggest problems facing managers and assistants today, however, is just keeping up with the times.

"We find so many changes," Ms. Martin said. "Changes in operating regulations, changes in technology, changes in foods, changes in children, changes in education systems."

It requires constant effort to keep up," she added.

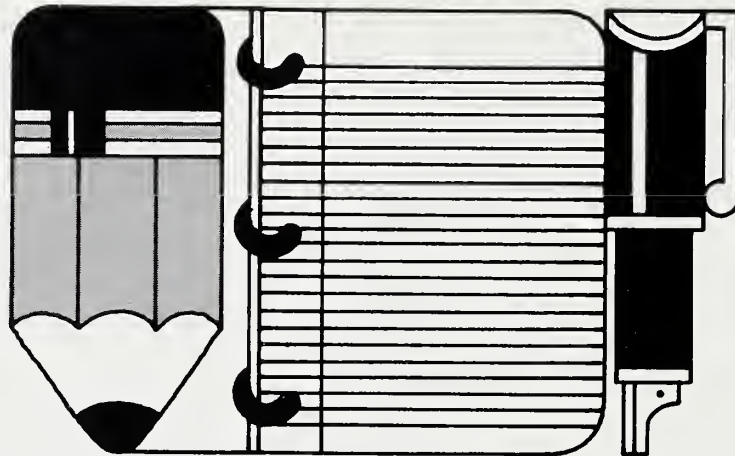
Federal and State people, however, are constantly working with local school food service people to help them keep up with the changing times and the changing program.





# TRAINING IS IMPORTANT

By Dianne D. Jenkins and Melanie Watts



## WHY SEND A MANAGER TO SCHOOL?

"A lot of people don't realize what's involved in being a cafeteria manager. So, they tend to look at training with somewhat of a jaundiced eye. Why go to school for 2 weeks to learn cooking?"

District supervisor Carol Wolken was addressing a group of South Dakota school food service workers at a training session held this summer. She looked around the room, then continued.

"We need to tell our story, to let people know what's involved. We need to educate our children, our teachers and administrators as to what this job's all about, and just why we're sending ourselves to school."

Why send a manager to school?

**To learn about food preparation and food service equipment.** What's the most economical way to make cookies—labor, or a machine that cuts 2,000 a minute? What food service equipment or efficiency techniques can you use in your kitchen?

**To learn about food specifications.** How do you know if the meat is 80-20 or 70-30, lean to fat? Did you ever try to buy your own cattle? How do you evaluate the economics of different meat cuts?

**To learn about serving systems.** Should you go to pre-pack or stay on-site? Should you open another serving area in the all-purpose room? How?

**To learn about nutrition.** What are water-soluble vitamins? What's the value of vitamin E? Can we get too many vitamins? How do you cook food to preserve vitamins?

**To learn about convenience foods.** What's the percentage of protein in the package? Does it fulfill Type A requirements? Is it truly economical?

**To learn about merchandising.** How do you work with student committees? How do you make your food look good as well as taste good? What ideas can you use to help fix up the cafeteria?

It's not a small job.

## WORKSHOPS PROVIDE SPECIAL OPPORTUNITIES

Attending workshops is one way to keep up with a fast-moving field.

Summer is "back-to-school" time for many people.

And every year, all across the country, thousands of school food service workers take part in workshops to improve and develop their professional skills.

Sponsored by State education agencies in cooperation with FNS, these workshops operate in a variety of ways. Some are very sophisticated, while others are more informal. Some last as long as 2 weeks—others might be just 1 day. Some have limited participation, and others are open to everyone who is interested. But regardless of how a State's workshop system operates, the idea is always the same—to help the school food service employee do a better job.

### Texas has several workshops

The Texas workshop system is one of the largest around, every summer featuring a number of 3-day sessions for cafeteria managers and supervisors of districtwide school food service operations. This year, there were 8 scheduled in all parts of the State, but in past years there have been as many as 12 summer workshops.

An obvious reason for this multiple approach is the size of the State. Another reason is added flexibility for participants.

This arrangement also reflects the management system the Texas education agency uses in administering school feeding programs. The State is divided into eight different areas, and a supervisor is assigned to each one. The supervisors visit schools and provide regular supervisory assistance, which includes help with special problems.

In addition to their other duties, area supervisors are responsible for having at least one workshop in their areas every summer.

Participation at these workshops is limited to cafeteria managers and supervisors, and the emphasis is on supervisory problems.

"We are better able to deal with supervisory problems," explains Charles Cole, Texas school lunch director. "And we hope these people will share what they learn with their staffs."

All plans for the workshops are coordinated through the State office, and staff dietician Sue Goodson has spent several years developing the six courses regularly taught. These include: a basic and an advanced course for managers, money management, nutrition, menu planning, and food purchasing.

Not every course is offered at every workshop, Ms. Goodson explains. Enough people must indicate an interest in a particular course for it to be included. And sometimes courses are added.

For the most part, the instructors at these workshops are area supervisors. "Our supervisors are well-qualified in all areas of school food service," points out Charles Cole. "So, they can teach all the courses, filling in wherever the need is."

But since each workshop takes about six or seven instructors, the State staff often enlists college professors, outstanding school lunch managers, and representatives from FNS.

#### **Everything managers should know**

"We're going to cover a lot of territory during the next 3 days," FNS representative Judy Snow told the people enrolled in the class she taught in Arlington, Texas, this summer. Ms. Snow was teaching the advanced course for school lunch managers.

And as she had promised, they covered a lot—from the Type A meal pattern to purchasing, nutrition, menu planning, sanitation, and employee relations. Like all of the other courses offered in Texas workshops, the course was designed to include everything managers should know. And, like the other courses, it started with the basics, and then moved into specialized areas.

#### **Participants help each other**

In addition to what they learned from instructors like Judy Snow, workshop participants learned a lot from each other. Area supervisors say that's one of the values of the workshop system. People from big city operations—where everyone is a specialist—get to talk with people from smaller towns, who, with two- and three-person staffs, must do everything.

#### **Training and experience varies**

Some participants at the Arlington workshop were newcomers, like a lady from Blum who had just moved into the manager's job last January. Other newcomers were people who had held manager jobs, but had just never attended a workshop.

"We have managers who have been working at it for 10 years or more and don't know everything they should," says Pauline Mostiller, one of the area supervisors. "They're doing a good job, but they could be doing it even better with less effort. No one knows everything."

But there were also some Arlington participants who are workshop regulars. As one of them explains, "In this business, you can't afford to stand still. Things are changing all the time, sometimes it seems everyday."

## **LEARNING AT HOME**

**Food for Youth is a 10-part training course on school food service.**

Daytime television's perennial favorites—soap operas and game shows—had some competition last winter in South Dakota, from a series that was more educational than entertaining.

Good nutrition was the subject of a serial that ran for 10 weeks, November through January, on the State's public television network. And while it didn't capture the entire television audience, it did attract a good portion of its intended viewers—the people who work with school breakfast and lunch programs.

"Food for Youth" is an introductory level course on nutrition and food service management designed to upgrade the skills and knowledge of school food service personnel.

The serial originated under the terms of an FNS contract to the New England States Educational Council, Inc. The serial was produced by WGBH Educational Foundation of Boston in conjunction with the Department of Nutrition in the School of Public Health, Harvard University. The purpose is threefold: (1) To motivate school food service personnel to use their existing knowledge and tools to upgrade children's diets; (2) To increase their knowledge and improve their understanding of nutrition; and (3) To illustrate the significance of nutrition to growth, development, health, and productivity of the individual.

#### **Series of ten films**

"Food for Youth" includes 10, 30-minute filmed segments that cover a variety of topics—like major nutrients, balanced diets, menu planning, food preparation, eating environments, and the effect of eating habits on the individual—especially the child. A study guide provides additional information and features a short quiz for each of the 10 programs. Satisfactory completion of these quizzes may contribute toward course credit.

Arrangements for showing the series in South Dakota were the responsibility of Lois Hoffman, dietitian for the State Department of Education and Cultural Affairs' school lunch section.

"We felt this would be an excellent means for getting more training to people in the field," Ms. Hoffman explains. "The shows go to so many people at once—people it would take ages to reach otherwise."

Ms. Hoffman met with public television officials at their headquarters in Brookings last fall. She had hoped to have each program aired twice a week, but this couldn't be arranged. They arranged to air the program every



Tuesday afternoon at 3:30. Ms. Hoffman then sent every school a study guide and a letter explaining the course.

#### **Course credit offered**

Issuance of credit points for each completed quiz is what attracted most people to the course. In order to maintain their accreditation, South Dakota school food service personnel must complete a required amount of training each year: supervisors,

45 points; managers, 30 points; and cook-managers, 25 points.

South Dakota assigned 10 points credit for completion of the entire course. More than half of the State's approximately 900 professionals completed the entire course, while many others received partial credit, at 1 point per quiz completed.

Many cafeteria staffs worked on the quizzes together, as Ms. Hoffman had suggested. She felt

this would encourage more discussion of the topics covered.

And apparently this theory worked, because people are still talking about the course and all they learned. But even more important is how these "graduates" are using what they learned—in carrying out their regular duties of preparing and serving well-balanced meals and in conducting nutrition education activities in classrooms and cafeterias. ☆

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# The People Behind the Program

*By Dianne D. Jenkins*

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## Getting the food and the money to the schools

Lorrie Heslig looks like the type of person who could take on almost anything and come out on top. She's from the Midwest, has lived there all her life, and is willing to engage any available sparring partner in a battle of words and wit over the advantages of country living. She's got two small children, who go to the local school.

Seven years ago, after her second child was born, Lorrie decided to take on a part-time job and learn some new skills. Today, she's got a full-time job on her hands that demands all the moxie she can deliver—she's a school lunch manager. Every afternoon, she and her two co-workers put out a tempting meal for 165 bubbling elementary school-children who squirm their way through the school lunch line.

Lorrie, her co-workers and the children are all participants in the National School Lunch Program.

But what does that really mean for Lorrie and the kids?

For Lorrie, it means she's required to serve well-balanced and nutritious lunches that meet requirements of USDA's Type A pattern. In return, her school gets money and some donated food from the Federal Government.

For the kids, of course, it means that they get a good meal at very little cost, or free, if they're from needy families.

#### **Money for school lunches**

Where does the money come from? Ultimately, it comes from all of us—the taxpayers. But it must move through the miles of red tape separating the Federal Treasury building in Washington, D.C. and Lorrie Heslig's kitchen. It's really quite simple—in theory.

Every year, Congress sets aside a certain amount of money for the National School Lunch Program. The Treasury Department, in turn, gives this money to the U.S.

Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Federal agency administering the lunch program. USDA's Food and Nutrition Service takes this money and hands it over to the States, and each State's education department makes sure local school districts get paid back for meals served to children in district schools.

#### **"Please reimburse"**

The key to the whole process is the school lunch manager. Every day, after Lorrie Heslig has sent the last of the kids scurrying through the lunch line and the clean-up process has begun, she fills out a form—a daily food service report. This report is Lorrie's way of sending a message: "I've served the required meals, please reimburse."

Schools receive set rates of money depending on the type of meal served—free, reduced-price, or full price. The majority of meals are served to students "full price," but, actually, even these meals are paid for in part by the tax dollars that support



the National School Lunch Program. (The rates also allow for changes in the cost of food, and are adjusted semi-annually to reflect any changes in the cost of living.) When Lorrie fills out her daily food service report form, she notes the number of meals served in each of the three categories.

Once a month, Lorrie's school district puts together the daily claim forms from all schools in the district and sends them on to the State department of education's school food service director. Drawing on the advance funding it has received from the Federal Government, the State sends out a check to Lorrie's school district, which, in turn, repays Lorrie's school.

### **Getting USDA-donated foods**

The route for donated foods, or commodities, is a little more direct. "I certainly don't have to fill out any forms to get commodities," says Lorrie. "They come in regularly—sometimes I think they've a mind of their own."

All commodities are purchases the Department of Agriculture has made on the open market. Usually, the Government buys these foods because of the supply situation. When there is too much of any one crop on the market, the price drops. If the price gets too low, the returns to the farmers may drop to the point where they may be forced out of business. To prevent this, the Government buys some of these foods and puts them to use in the school lunch program.

FNS passes these foods on to the States, who in turn dispatch them to schools like Lorrie's. The schools' only cost is a small charge for handling and shipping within the State.

So, the Federal Government, working through the State governments, delivers money and food to Lorrie's school and to some 90,000 other schools across the country.

### **It all depends on people**

However, "government" is a big word and, at times, a misleading word. Government is actually people. Individuals in every sense the word implies—every one

unique, all with different backgrounds and from various parts of the country. But the people in the Federal and State governments who work with child nutrition programs all have one thing in common. By accident, or design, they have become involved in a demanding job—feeding children.

Who are these people? What do they do? And how do they work with each other and with people in the schools?

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## **The State people**

State directors and their staffs are the link between the National School Lunch Program and the people in the schools.

State directors' jobs are complex, like the programs they administer. Their principal task is managing the lunch program in their States. But in addition to the lunch program, State people are also responsible for four other child feeding programs: the School Breakfast Program; the Child Care Food Program; the Summer Food Program for Children; and the Special Milk Program.

Like hundreds of voices clamoring together, the complex programs demand ceaseless attention.

"The reimbursement check for school 280 was lost in the mail. Can you issue us a new one?"

Memo: "State reimbursement data is incomplete. Please file again."

"Drop what you're doing. We need you down here. There's a meeting of school board members, and one member is set on convincing everyone that the school lunch program has nothing to do with education."

### **Staffing is important**

State staffs number anywhere from 3 to 40 people, depending on the size of the State. "A big problem for State staffs is that they just don't have enough people or money to do all the things they're required to do," says Merle Hagerty. At the request of Congress, FNS has been conducting a study of State

staffing needs, and its findings go to Congress in the fall.

The Federal Government first began giving money to States to help them out with the administration costs for child nutrition programs in 1969. That year, States received \$1.3 million in Federal money for administrative expenses. In 1976, States received \$11.1 million. But, according to program administrators, the programs have become increasingly complex, and increases in Federal and State funds just haven't kept pace with the rising costs of administering the program. In 1969, State costs for administering the program were approximately \$7 million; today, they are up to \$45 million.

### **Experts in many areas**

The management work of State people extends over a number of different areas. They provide assistance to cafeteria managers by coordinating workshops. They give advice on equipment purchases, menu planning, nutrition education, and serving systems. They write food specifications and help with personnel management and job placements. And they explain the program to community groups, school board members, parents and school administrators. This means that they must be expert not only in money management, but also in training, nutrition education, evaluation and public relations.

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## **The Federal people**

One big part of the job of Federal people is interpreting child nutrition legislation and turning it into national rules and guidelines for running the program. A second big part of this job is money. How much money will it take to run the program? Is it available? How should it be distributed to the States?

In order to get a handle on this job and keep in touch with how the lunch program is working, people from FNS meet regularly with State school food service



directors, nutritionists, school food service workers, and members of the American School Food Service Association.

An important link between the people in Washington and the schools is the National Advisory Council on Child Nutrition. Made up of 15 people representing all aspects of child nutrition, the Council meets several times a year and takes a look at how the programs are working. The Council then suggests changes and new directions.

Another link between Washington and the schools are the FNS regional offices located all around the country: Burlington, Massachusetts; Princeton, New Jersey; Atlanta; Chicago; Dallas; and San Francisco. A new FNS Regional Office is opening in Denver this fall. In each Regional Office, FNS child nutrition staffs work closely with the education agencies in the various States the Region serves.

### **Working with the States**

In almost everything they do, Federal people work through the State school food service offices. And, in many ways, the concerns of these Federal people mirror those of the State people—management of money, evaluating and monitoring programs, providing nutrition education and technical assistance.

Federal people take part in workshops sponsored by State and local people, providing assistance with program guidelines, food service systems, equipment, nutrition education and food preparation.

The FNS Child Nutrition Division in Washington has a staff of seven people who are specialists in food service systems, and each of the six FNS Regional Offices also has a food service systems specialist. These people crisscross the country, analyzing schools' food service operations and teaching at workshops. They look at such things as: How well is the school's kitchen laid out? What can be done to improve it without spending more money? If there is money avail-

able, what kind of equipment would help? Or, if a new school is being built, what food service system would be best?

The specialists provide assistance to cafeteria managers at workshops, where they offer tips on preparing food quicker and easier and on making the best use of equipment and food storage facilities. This kind of information also is included in FNS publications designed to help the cafeteria manager.

Other people in FNS who reach out and work directly with cafeteria managers are members of the Nutrition and Technical Services Staff. As nutrition specialists, they work primarily with meal patterns for school lunch and school breakfast, providing food service management assistance for cafeteria managers through publications such as menu planning and food buying guides. These people also develop nutrition education materials for use in training school food service personnel.

### **A team approach**

For the past 2 years, various FNS people have been working with cafeteria managers through a program called MTA, or Management and Technical Assistance. MTA is a team project, bringing together representatives from the Federal and State governments and local school food service staffs.

These MTA teams have been visiting large school systems in 157 cities to review every aspect of their food service operation. The teams' main job is to help schools identify their problems and then work with them to find solutions. Each MTA team includes people who are expert in three areas: money management, program management, and food preparation.

One of the most important things about MTA's team effort however, is that it is a two-way street—Federal and State people give advice to local people, and local and State people give Federal people a better picture of the problems they face.

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## **The State-Federal relationship--working with regulations**

At all levels, the people who work with child nutrition programs share one problem: adjusting to the demands of growth and change. In recent years, there have been significant program changes as a result of new laws.

And, as FNS child nutrition programs manager Jerry Boling says, "Considerable time over the past few years has been taken up by the demands of change as people in Federal and State governments work together to carry out these new laws."

After a new law is enacted, it's up to FNS to put that law into effect. While the statute may require all schools to offer reduced-price lunches, for instance, it doesn't spell out how to put that order into operation.

That's the job of the people in FNS who write up the rules or regulations by which the program operates. These become the bible of school lunch operations.

### **"The best possible regulations"**

This year, FNS tried something new in writing regulations. In the past, to help them prepare regulations, the FNS people would meet several times a year with State directors and others involved in the lunch program to get a feeling for their ideas and their problems.

"Now what we're doing," says Merle Hagerty, "is actually involving these people in the writing process."

As the first step this summer, FNS invited the nutrition committee of the American School Food Service Association to Washington to discuss proposed changes in the Type A pattern. In welcoming the committee, FNS Administrator Edward J. Hekman said the meeting was a good example of the Department's effort to come up with the best possible regulations.

"We want to get together with groups like this one before we even propose regulations," he ex-



plained. "We want to know what you think—I hope you all are free and frank.

"If you don't agree," he told the group, "let's hear it. We came here to learn. So let's get some of our concerns out on the table so we can have a common front to attack our problems."

The people at FNS want that common front to extend to State directors too. "Frequently,"

says Roberta Bosch, chairperson of the State directors, "we are frustrated because we feel we don't have enough say—we don't have enough authority."

#### Meeting with State directors

In July, FNS attacked this source of frustration in another meeting. Several FNS people met with a group of State directors in Springfield, Illinois, and together they worked on writing regulations

that deal with the assignment of reimbursement rates in school lunch programs.

Federal people rely on State staffs to make regulations like this workable for the schools, points out Merle Hagerty.

And it makes sense. The State directors and their staffs have a special understanding that comes from working with people in the schools.

## The Springfield meeting

"These Federal-State meetings may be slug fests, but we have a common bond that holds us together. The dedication we share is much stronger than the forces that pull us apart. We are indeed very good friends."

—Merle Hagerty

The working session on proposed regulations was held in a conference room on the 16th floor of the largest hotel in Springfield, Illinois. While Springfield houses 92,000 people, at heart it's still a small town.

The people began settling in around the conference table while the sun was still burning mist off the streets outside, and people were hurrying to get where they were going before things began to bake. Inside, the eight State directors from all parts of the country were getting ready to get down to some hard talking. The eight were elected representatives of all State directors in the country.

One of the two women in the group was Roberta Bosch, from North Dakota. Recently elected by all State directors as the group's new chairperson, Ms. Bosch has been working with child feeding programs for over 15 years. The regard in which she is held by her colleagues is evidenced by her new position.

Massachusetts State director John Stalker seated himself with a few crisp hellos. The former chairperson of the State directors has been involved

with school lunch since 1946.

As fresh pitchers of ice water were being passed, and glasses were being filled for the first time, Gene Dickey, school lunch program manager for FNS, started the discussion. He focused on reviewing the major aspects of the child nutrition legislation passed a year ago, and how FNS was working with the States to put the new law into operation.

These were just preliminaries, however. The meat of the meeting was an eight-page proposed regulatory amendment—"the reimbursement procedures docket." As the docket spelled out, school lunch programs are required to be nonprofit. But what happens if a lunch program winds up the year with what looks to be a lot of extra money. Why did it happen? Was the school paid too much, or did the school not accurately record all expenses?

Gene Dickey's experience with school food service includes 5 years at FNS' Southeast Regional Office. "I have a personal commitment to child nutrition programs," he said later, on his way back to Washington. "I don't know exactly how or where, but I expect I will always be involved with these programs. This is my life. This is what I want to do." Because of his regional experience, Gene Dickey is especially sensitive to the needs of the State directors, and he was instrumental in bringing about the meeting.

In an understatement of sorts, Jerry Boling once said: "Regulatory debate is useful be-

cause it gives you an understanding of the words." This was evident as Gene Dickey and the group moved slowly through the proposed regulations.

"What's the meaning of this phrase? . . . What's your intention here? . . . How can we possibly? . . ." The discussion went on for 2 hours. The result was a dry water pitcher, empty glasses, and full ashtrays. The sun was bright, and heat seemed to radiate in waves.

And the discussion continued. The process continued. Like people struggling with giant pieces of a national jig-saw puzzle, they struggled with the words, cutting, reshaping, trying to work around the angles that just wouldn't fit. On to page four.

Finally, the intensity gave way to frustration, tempers and laughter. With a wide grin, Joe Stewart, school food service director in Washington, D.C., started laughing at the enemy—the words "variables," "justifies," "zero family rates." His laugh eased around the room, breaking the tension, like rain breaking heat. Then silence, shuffling papers and a sudden swell of voices as the debate took off again. Gradually, through the debris of words they left behind, the real cause of the conflict became clear. How do we write rules that are always fair? How do we write rules to make the program consistent and still adjust to the needs of individuals?

A half day later, they all left Springfield. They had haggled and hassled. But they had written the proposed rules of the program together.

☆



**"H**alf the job of the cafeteria manager is in the dishroom checking what's in the garbage." The man who said that was Gary Reed, city director of food service in Huron, South Dakota.

Speaking before a group of school food service workers, city director Reed said, "We've got to prove that the lunch program can be number one in the food industry. We can't be complacent. We can't sit back thinking, well, we've got nutritious food and it's cheap—take it or leave it. The food has got to be appealing and the lunch program has got to stand on its own."

There are a lot of ways to see the problem of food waste in the school lunch program. The issue is volatile, complex, and as many-sided as the number of people involved.

A few days after Gary Reed spoke to the school food service workers in South Dakota, FNS Administrator Edward J. Hekman spoke on the same subject to the nutrition committee of the American School Food Service Association in Washington, D.C. And, despite the distances separating the South Dakota city director and the national administrator, their views were remarkably similar. "It's apparent that plate waste is an issue that is of great concern," Administrator Hekman said. "It's an issue for which we have no easy answer. But it is an issue we can help each other with. We can see that we do all we can to get at the causes of plate waste and still keep the nutritional values of the lunch. It's not going to be easy," he said. "But if we work together, we can do it."

#### **Looking at the problem**

Food waste is one of the most crucial issues facing the lunch program and school food service workers today. Many people see it as a problem that will simply disappear. Others see it as a threat to the nutritional promises of the lunch program. And, still others see it as an issue whose time is long overdue; an issue with which we must deal. How can we be pledged to nutrition standards, they say, if the nutrition is ending up in the garbage instead of children's stomachs?

So, what can we do about plate waste, and how are we trying to deal with it? To get a more accurate picture of the plate waste problem, FNS is conducting studies in a number of areas:

- **Food acceptability.** One hundred and four schools are included in this study, which tries to zero in on foods children usually throw away. The study also looks for answers to questions like: How much food is served? What is the nutritional value of the lunch as it is served and eaten? Results will be part of a comprehensive report on food waste which FNS will deliver to Congress this fall.

- **Food service systems.** This study examines the difference between: (1) meals prepared and served at school; (2) meals prepared in a central kitchen and transported to the serving school in bulk containers; (3) meals prepared in a central kitchen, then preportioned for individual students and

# **PLATE WASTE— views on a complex issue**

*By Dianne D. Jenkins*

transported to the serving school in hot and cold packs, and (4) meals prepared and frozen ahead of time in individual portions, and reheated in the serving school.

- **High school meal patterns.** FNS expects to let a contract this fall for a study that will explore different meal patterns for high school students. Key elements in the study will be the nutritional value of foods students choose and eat, student satisfaction, and labor and food costs per meal.

#### **Varied portion sizes**

In addition to these studies, FNS is also working with the National Advisory Council on Child Nutrition and the nutrition committee of the American School Food Service Association to revise current meal pattern requirements. This will allow schools to vary portion sizes for various age groups. The food pattern now in use specifies minimum amounts of foods based on the needs of 10- to 12-year old children.

#### **New rule for high schools**

Another key tool for getting at food waste is a legislative provision dubbed "offer vs. serve."

"Offer vs. serve" means that students of a senior high school grade level are no longer required to take all five food items included in the Type A lunch. Before, all schools taking part in the National School Lunch Program had to serve each student a portion of meat, or a meat alternate like fish or cheese, two or more vegetables or fruits, bread, and milk. Now, schools "offer" students of senior high grade levels all five items, but the students can choose as few as three, if they wish. Schools will still receive full reimbursement for the meals served. However, students still must pay for a complete Type A lunch.

Why this change? Because of food waste. When new child nutrition legislation was written last fall, considerable concern was expressed about the problem of food waste in the lunch program. Along with that concern was the realization that high school students are too old to be told what to eat and should choose their own food. So, the law re-





quires schools to simply offer, rather than serve, all the foods in the Type A lunch pattern to high school students.

What does this change mean for cafeteria managers and school lunch programs? Views vary. Some say this change in the lunch program undermines the nutrition standards represented by the Type A meal requirements. Others view the change as an opportunity for cafeteria managers to have more flexibility and responsibility.

However, even those who are concerned by this change agree on the importance of reducing plate waste. For example, Roberta Bosch, chairperson of State school food service directors said, "For too long we've sat back believing we had a captive audience. The time certainly has come when we have to merchandise our food."

ASFSA President Jo Martin also expressed concern with the "offer vs. serve" provision but agreed that it's important to make lunches appealing. "We have a real, with a capital 'R,' need to work toward serving quality food," she said. "I just don't believe that if we serve quality food and use portion control we'll have a significant plate waste problem."

The success of this new law, according to Ms. Martin, "really depends on what kind of commitment we, as individuals, have to the lunch program's nutritional standards. This new provision can be a cop-out; an opportunity to just serve food a la carte. It's really up to us to turn this thing around and serve food that's so good, kids won't be able to turn it down."

#### **Making it work**

Jerry Boling, manager of child nutrition programs for FNS, emphasizes that in order for offer vs. serve to work, it's necessary for everyone "up and down the line" to take responsibility for the lunch program's success or failure. "We've all got to think, to question, to use our common sense, and get away from the philosophy that encourages us to sign on the dotted line but pass the responsibility on to someone else," he said.

"We need to keep our eyes focused on the

overall purpose of this legislation—to get rid of food waste," he added. "Obviously, we want to use menu forecasting techniques to make sure we don't fix more food than the kids will take. But we also need to use common sense. If I'm a manager, for instance, and I make spinach for 100 kids and only 5 kids take it, I don't need to be using menu forecasting. I need to be asking a much more fundamental question: Why aren't the kids eating spinach, and what can I serve that they will eat?"

#### **Solutions are not simple**

While offer vs. serve should help reduce food waste in high school lunch programs, the causes of food waste remain a controversial issue.

Some people are eyeing the program's nutrition standards, the Type A lunch requirements. Are we trying to do too much with school lunch? Are we aiming too high by trying to provide 1/3 of the recommended dietary allowance of vitamins and minerals at lunch?

For Jerry Boling, the answer is no. "The thing you have to remember, and a lot of people seem to forget, is that this isn't just a food program. The thing that makes this program different is: it's concerned with nutrition.

"The national nutrition standards are our way of demonstrating that school lunch money is being well spent," he continued. But Jerry Boling doesn't believe the program's nutrition standards are the primary cause of food waste. "The real causes are tied up in the complexities of children's wants and needs, poor preparation and serving techniques, and management skills and attitudes. And obviously these complexities don't exist just because we have nutrition standards for lunch," he said.

Jo Martin sees it pretty much the same way. She doesn't believe that the lunch program's problem with food waste can simply be tied to the program's Type A lunch requirements. "To really solve the problem of plate waste, we need to have better trained school food service workers. We need our managers to manage and not get sidetracked cooking. We need to improve our procurement standards so we can be sure we are buying the best foods possible. And, we need to make sure our children are getting the nutrition education they need to be able to make sound decisions."

While people see many causes and solutions to the problem of food waste in the school lunch program, there is a solid bottom line—if children are throwing away food, the nutrition standards are simply words on paper.

#### **There's a lot at stake**

"If we are to live up to the promises of the program's nutrition standards, we must solve the food waste problem," said Jerry Boling. "And if we succeed in producing and merchandising appetizing, nutritious food, we will not only be attacking the food waste problem, we will be making the program more successful financially. We will again prove that the program can stand on its own." ☆

# HOW CAN WE GET KIDS TO EAT?

That's the question for many school lunch people these days. And they've come up with some interesting answers. Add more choice...involve students...develop new serving systems...use better merchandising...these are just a few.

## Buffet style meals

In Kentucky, about 100 junior and senior high schools have adopted a "smorgasboard" system, in which students walk down both sides of a serving counter, dishing up their own lunches from a variety of available foods.

At the beginning of the school year, someone from the State or local school food service staff explains the system to the students. And each day an adult monitors activity at the serving line, encouraging students to choose well-balanced meals.

A variation of this system is used in some elementary schools—especially with the upper grades—except there the children make their selections from pre-portioned servings.

As C.E. Bevins, Kentucky's director of school food service noted, this system increases acceptability of the lunches and improves participation.

## A build-your-own-sandwich-line

At Wheeler High School in Cobb County, Georgia, a Build-Your-Own-Sandwich line proved so successful last year that a number of other county schools adopted the idea.

Mary Nix, school food service supervisor for Cobb County, said students going through this line choose from four or five different breads, as well as any 3-ounce combination of four or five sandwich fillings. Cafeteria personnel standing behind the counter serve, but do not assemble, the ingredients. Mustard and ketchup are available in the dining room, and other condiments and sandwich ingredients may be requested at the counter.

In addition to the sandwich line, most county senior high schools have a traditional hot lunch line, a salad bar, and a short-order counter, where students can get hamburgers and hot dogs.

As Ms. Nix explained, "We're meeting the nutritional needs of our students with a minimum amount of waste by serving food students accept."

## Getting students involved

At Rockbridge Elementary School in Stone Mountain, Georgia, cafeteria manager Miriam Dameron has organized a student "taste panel" to build interest in the lunch program and help eliminate plate waste.

Two children in each class in grades four through seven serve on this panel. Their job is to taste unusual foods or new recipes—such as sweet and sour pork or California tamale pie—and then discuss the dishes in their classes and encourage their classmates to taste the foods at lunchtime.

The panel changes every 6 weeks, giving more people a chance to be involved. "This helps children feel that the lunch program is not *for* them but that it's *their* program," Ms. Dameron said.



## Type A--the Gary way

"Build an A the Gary Way" is a new system schools in Gary, Indiana, use to identify components of the Type A lunch. "G" is for meat, or meat alternate. "A" is for fruit and vegetable. "R" is for bread. And "Y" is for milk. Students take two "A's", since the Type A lunch includes two servings of fruits and/or vegetables, and one each of everything else.

As a result of this system, city officials report the best decrease in plate waste in several years. This promotion, they say, has been very successful in merchandising the Type A lunch and has greatly reduced the number of a la carte sales.

## Color-coded lunches

Inspired by the American Revolution Bicentennial—or her own color preferences—food service director Mary Prager is using a red, white and blue motif in her school's lunch line.

The Fullerton, California, food service director has designed a system that uses color to encourage students to choose balanced Type A lunches. Different colors are assigned to the various food items. Red is for the entree, white is for milk, and blue is for fruit and vegetable items. If a child comes through the line with one "red," one "white" and two "blues," he gets the meals for 55 cents and a free cookie, too.

Ms. Prager reports that response has been excellent. The average number of meals served is 120—up from the 1974 average of 40 to 60.

## Trying something new

Menu plans are a regular part of a school food service director's job. But what about 3-year plans to end deficit spending—sound more like the world of economists?

That's just what New Haven school food service director Marjorie Holgate is working on. With the help of FNS food service systems specialists, Ms. Holgate has developed a 3-year plan to cut costs and make the best use of equipment.

Over the years, the New Haven lunch program had evolved into a centralized system serving complete hot and cold pack lunches from vendors. While oven, kettles, and other equipment in schools fell into disuse or were underutilized, costs mounted and the system required subsidy from the city. Following a Management and Technical Assistance study, the food service staff decided to change to a newer, less costly food production and delivery system.

New Haven is now in the first stage of the 3-year plan, which initially calls for preparation of all cold pack lunches. The plan also includes preparation of some portions of hot meals in bulk. The addition of

griddles and deep fryers will allow for more flexibility in menu planning and better merchandising. Savings of \$90,000 are expected in the first year.

## A giant tasting party

When Rudy Francis, director of the Santa Ana Unified School District in southern California, promised students they would have a greater voice in the school's lunch program, he wasn't joking.

Santa Ana Valley High School switched from a menu featuring one lunch a day to one offering as many as 10 different combination meals, and Mr. Francis made sure the food catered to students' tastes. For example, monthly meetings with students brought to light complaints about the burritos being served by the school's food service. In response, Mr. Francis planned a giant tasting party, assembling 100 students in the gymnasium to sample every kind of burrito he could find.

The result? The students chose the one the cafeteria had been using all along!

## Lunch in a restaurant

The school lunch program feeds the mind as well as the body, as operations at a high school in Victorville, California, demonstrate. The school's lunch program provides an inexpensive, nutritious meal and also offers students an excellent chance to learn valuable job skills.

The service section of the Victorville High School cafeteria has been set up to resemble a short-order restaurant. Some student workers call orders back to the kitchen from a service counter, while others pick up and serve the completed orders. Another student works as cashier.

Food service director Thelma Zimmerman reports a very small loss of money and says she feels the program is excellent practical training. Designed to resemble the kinds of eating places students patronize near campus, the lunchroom set-up has been so successful that other district schools want to copy it.

## Serving french fry lovers

When Barstow schools began serving sandwiches and french fries in the lunch program, food service director Ruth Hart went to the "experts" to learn serving techniques. After finding out where to order the parchment bags used by local drive-ins, Ms. Hart ordered bags which would hold larger portions than those dished out by restaurants. French fry "baggers," also used in drive-ins, allow lunchroom workers to fill french fry bags quickly and neatly.

Another handy technique Ms. Hart picked up from the drive-ins and fast food outlets was wrapping hot sandwiches in color-coded foil to make them easy to locate and identify. ☆

# A PROUD RECORD

By Melanie Watts

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Over 1,200 people received special recognition this year for their work with child nutrition programs. They are the pioneers who helped begin the National School Lunch Program 30 years ago and who have worked with school food service ever since. Some are Federal and State people, but most are people who are in the schools--school food service supervisors, cafeteria managers, school administrators, and others.

The following story is about one of these people--a woman who has served with child nutrition programs in a number of capacities. Like the many dedicated men and women who have devoted their careers to school lunch, she has seen lots of changes in the program, and she's contributed greatly to its success.

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The National School Lunch Program has undergone many changes since it first started 30 years ago. Few people know this better than Mildred Stringfield, food service director for the schools in East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana. Ms. Stringfield has been involved in feeding kids since even before school lunch became a permanent program in 1946.

Her school food service career started, in an indirect way, while she was a home economics teacher in two Arkansas communities, between 1932 and 1946. And in those days, that job automatically carried the added responsibility of directing

whatever lunch program the school operated.

#### **Working with early programs**

"In the 1930's, most programs were supplemental in nature," Ms. Stringfield explains. "We served hot soup to children whose parents were out of work. This was supposed to supplement the lunches they brought from home, but it was very often the only thing some kids had."

At that time, PTA and other local interest groups were largely responsible for starting school feeding programs. About the only assistance available was in the form of commodity foods supplied by the Works Progress Administration.

"We had a makeshift kitchen behind the stage," recalls Ms. Stringfield, "and our equipment consisted of one hot plate. The kids ate in the gym, an arrangement that lasted until years later, when the community center was turned into a cafeteria."

#### **The change to complete meals**

By the 1940's, the program had basically changed shape. Lunches were more complete meals and were available to all students. The U.S. Department of Agriculture was now involved, working directly with participating schools and providing commodity foods as well as a cash reimbursement of about 7 cents for each meal served.

And under Ms. Stringfield's direction, the Greenwood school converted two classrooms into a kitchen, large enough to accommodate a new institution size range and oven. The PTA took out the loan for the new equipment, and then paid it off with profits from the lunch program operation.

A lunch sold for 15 cents and consisted of "the basic seven"—essentially the same nutritional standard used for today's lunch program.

"We fed about 100 to 150 kids every day," Ms. Stringfield says of her four-person staff, who prepared all menu items from scratch. "This was most of the enrollment but even then, we had to compete with neighborhood snack bars."

She also directed the lunch program at a nearby rural school—with a daily business of about 100 students—in addition to teach-



ing eight classes and running the vocational home economics program 12 months a year.

### **Some special difficulties**

There were unique problems in putting food on the table in those days. Many food items, like sugar, were rationed during the war years and could only be purchased with stamps. "We used those stamps very carefully," smiles Mildred Stringfield, "and we were always on the lookout for any stamps that people in the community weren't using."

Local farmers sometimes would donate corn for use in the lunch program. Ms. Stringfield always appreciated the donations, but they did mean more work.

"I'd get my home-ec girls to help," she explains, "and we would use the community canning center to put up the corn. The contributing farmer always got a good share of the finished product, as a reward for his generosity."

Problems with commodities presented special difficulties. Deliveries, which consisted mostly of fresh and canned vegetables, were irregular, and this made advanced menu planning nearly impossible. Also, delays in transporting sometimes resulted in spoilage problems with fresh items. Most deliveries contained a variety of easy-to-use foods, such as cabbage and carrots, but some shipments arrived with just one item. "And inevitably," smiles Ms. Stringfield, "those one-item deliveries would be some hard-to-use product."

### **Helping the program expand**

In 1946, the National School Lunch Act made school food service a permanent part of the educational system, and gave USDA national responsibility for administering the program.

That same year, Mildred Stringfield joined the Arkansas State Department of Education as a district supervisor for a 20-county area. It was her job to travel this territory, consisting of 310 school districts, and to encourage expansion of the

school lunch program.

"Most schools had some kind of program by then," she recalls, "but lots of people still weren't sold on the idea. So I met with school boards and town people, stressing the good points of the program—which included added nutritional benefits for students and increased job opportunities for people in the community."

For 7 years she did this, traveling mostly unpaved roads and working around the clock. Somehow, in her spare time, she initiated and taught a course about school lunch and family nutrition for 2 years at the University of Arkansas.

In 1953, after much persuasion from folks she had worked with on summer workshops in Louisiana, Ms. Stringfield moved to East Baton Rouge Parish to become food service director. Since then, the program has doubled in size: schools in East Baton Rouge Parish now serve 18,000 breakfasts and 26,000 lunches daily.

"I was reluctant to leave Arkansas, since it is my home," the food service director remembers, "but saw the offer as just too good an opportunity to turn down. Louisiana has always been progressive in school lunch."

### **An impressive record**

Louisiana is still progressive in school lunch, and Ms. Stringfield helps to maintain that reputation. For example, all but a third of the managers in the 112 schools in her district hold college degrees in home economics and have 23 hours in food and nutrition and institutional management. Many are registered dietitians.

"We don't arbitrarily require a degree," she explains. "It's just that there are many obvious advantages in employing people with this background. They are considered more a part of the faculty, they can make menu changes when necessary without altering the nutritional balance, and they need less train-

ing to prepare them for the job."

One big plus is that more and more teachers are using these managers to teach nutrition in the classroom. "After all," as one teacher points out, "this is their specialty. They know a lot more about it than I do."

But to get people like this, salaries and benefits have to be made attractive. Ms. Stringfield worked long and hard to explain this to the parish school board.

### **Emphasis on professionalism**

"Mildred spent many hours, in board meetings and on her own time, convincing top administrators that food service is a profession and as such, is an integral part of the educational process," says Nell Brouillette, school lunch consultant for the Louisiana State Department of Education and former employee in Ms. Stringfield's parish.

And to insure that this professional reputation is maintained, Ms. Stringfield emphasizes continual training for her staff. For instance, she initiated a 4-week course to prepare qualified employees for head cook jobs.

"We started this 2 years ago," says the food service director, who feels such a course increases staff proficiency and professionalism. "Some topics we cover include cleaning, sanitation, work methods, safety, food storage, inventory, and getting along with co-workers and faculty."

All in all, Ms. Stringfield has worked hard to upgrade the image of school food services in East Baton Rouge Parish. And, in doing so, she has enhanced the integrity of school food service personnel everywhere.

She's seen a lot in her near half-century in the business. What started out as a temporary feeding program to help out during the depression years has since developed into an ongoing, multi-million-dollar business.

But the thing she's proudest of is that food service today is concerned with nutrition and is so much more than "just a feeding program." ☆



# SCHOOL LUNCH AND THE COMMUNITY

By Dianne D. Jenkins, Dianne Killmer, Linda Klein, and Catherine Tim Jensen

Schools are an important part of a community, and so is the school lunch program. More and more people are recognizing the importance of school lunch, thanks to efforts of imaginative school food service staffs.

They've taken time to get students, parents, and community groups interested and involved--and the results are impressive.

## "SELLING" THE PROGRAM

Building a successful school lunch program requires not only the energy and dedication of school food service workers but the backing of the community. Getting that backing is one of the jobs of the district food service director.

"A good deal of the district director's time is spent explaining, and often justifying, the lunch program to people—principals, teachers, parents, community leaders, and student groups," explained Merle Hagerty, a former district and State director now working for FNS. "This is really the hot spot," he continued. "This person is on the firing line. All the administrative pressures, financial pressures, and community pressures center here.

"And then," he said laughing, "this person also gets all the

complaints. There's no salt on the table—you put salt on the table. It's stolen—you put the salt on a string. The string is cut. . ."

### **Make a commitment**

Gary Reed is director of food service for public schools in Huron, South Dakota, and his job has given him a lot of ideas about school lunch. And, for him, the ideas seem to be paying off; 94 percent of the 3,900 students in his district take advantage of the school lunch program.

"The first thing to do," advised Mr. Reed, "is develop your

commitment to having the best lunch program in the State. Once you've got that commitment, you've got to be positive about your ability to carry it off. And you've got to pass on that confidence to your employees, your students, and your administrator.

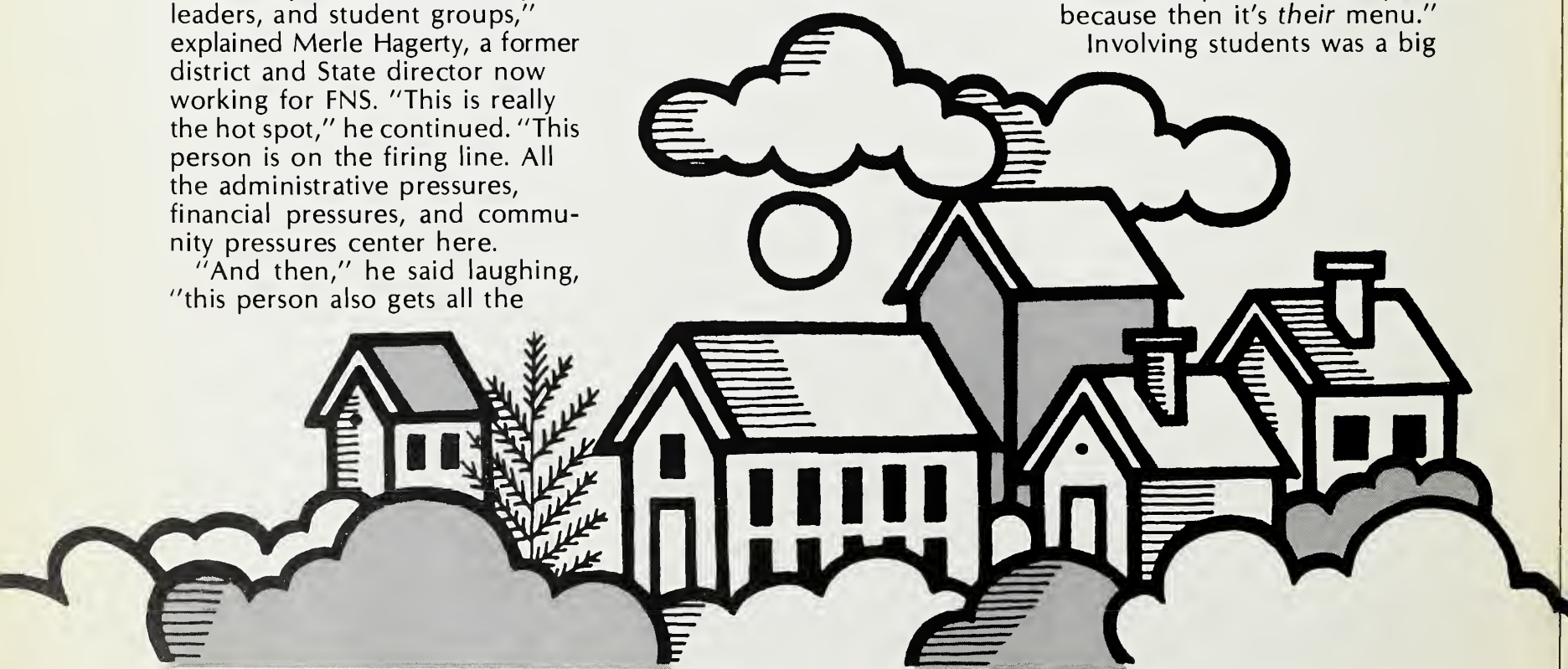
"Everybody is selling themselves and selling their product or services," he continued. "Before you even see a hamburger, you hear about Ronald MacDonald.

MacDonald has sold Ronald to the public just like Kentucky Fried Chicken has sold Colonel Sanders. People are going to eat Ronald's hamburgers because they like him, just like they're going to eat Colonel Sander's chicken because they like him."

Gary Reed took his own advice. He decided to sell himself and sell his program. He went to his administrator, he went to parent groups, he went to kids in every school in Huron.

He formed a student committee made up of kids from kindergarten through 12th grade. That committee now meets twice a month and reviews the rough draft of the menu plans. "One person can't sit behind a desk and draw up a menu for over 3,000 kids," explained Mr. Reed. "It takes time, 2 weeks, to get the student's input, but it's important because then it's *their* menu."

Involving students was a big





help, said Mr. Reed, but he realized something was missing—community backing.

"When you stop to think about it," he pointed out, "this program is big business in Huron. We have a payroll of \$100,000 and a food budget of \$350,000. We have a half million dollar industry here. So I said to the community, let's get with it, let's look at my program."

Director Reed kept meeting, talking, selling. Finally, the ball began to get rolling. "We got to the point where we had the people involved—parents, students, the community. Then we had to make sure we were backing up our bragging."

#### **"Back up the bragging"**

Mr. Reed encouraged the food service staff to work as a team and improve their knowledge of nutrition and service skills. He emphasized the importance of good merchandizing, noting that as much as 60 to 70 percent of food acceptability is based on eye appeal. "We have to make sure that our good food looks like good food," he said.

Mr. Reed is always looking for new food ideas. He subscribes to a variety of journals concerning food and the food industry. "If the industry is doing something and it looks good, I copy it.

"Kids are a lot more sophisticated these days, and we've got to be a lot more sophisticated right along with them," he urged.

"The lunch program is a big industry and can no longer be considered the stepchild of the food industry. We can make this program number one. If we involve students and the community, get in on decision-making committees and back up our promises in the kitchens, we can show our schools just how much they need us. This kind of dedication takes time and effort," he said, "but it's an investment that pays off."

## GETTING PARENT FEEDBACK

When 70 of San Antonio's parents go to lunch, it's not to the country club or a bridge party. They are members of a committee unique to this Texas town's North East Independent School District. And they canvass 33 schools to examine school food service and student preferences.

The PTA lunchroom committee started 17 years ago when the district was rural and had only three schools. The district's supervisor, Dr. Virgil Blossom, now deceased, had recently arrived from Arkansas, where he had initiated a similar committee. Less than 100 students had been eating in the school cafeteria in that Arkansas district, and he wanted parent feedback about "why."

Today, 33,000 San Antonio students benefit from parents going to the school cafeterias and trying the food their children eat.

The committee members go unannounced to the schools and introduce themselves to the principals upon arrival. They wear identifying badges to receive free

lunch, for which the district reimburses the school food service. **Keeps communication open**

Assistant superintendent for student services John F. Taylor was a school principal when the lunchroom committee was organized, and he was adamantly opposed to the idea. Now, he's a strong advocate.

"After the first year," he says, "as an administrator, I realized how invaluable it was—it was keeping communications open with parents."

Mr. Taylor began eating with the visiting members, but he still gave them a chance to be on their own. "You have to expect some criticism and hope for some compliments," he points out. He believes the key point in the committee's success is that the cafeteria manager and principal work with the parents.

"Any district will see reservation among school principals about starting the school lunchroom committee—and the school will have to expect comparison with another school. But if I had it to do over again, I'd sure encourage anyone to have the lunchroom committee," he said.

#### **Parents make monthly reports**

Each school's Parent-Teacher Association has its own lunchroom committee, and from this committee, two people are appointed to the district PTA council's lunchroom committee. After eating in assigned school cafeterias, these people report their findings in 1-hour meetings





held each month during the school year. Topics range from the general condition of the lunchrooms and the cleanliness of trays and eating utensils, to the temperature and quality of the food, and the size of the servings.

In preparing their reports, parents begin with a single-page form initiated by food service director Sam Reile in 1968. Mr. Reile thinks the form helps committee members get a better reception from principals.

"Having something written helps principals understand the purpose of the visits," he says.

Mr. Reile sees the committee's responsibility as limited to the kitchen and meals. "The appearance of the cafeteria and the behavior of the students are responsibilities of the principal."

After the committee hears individual reports, the forms go to school food managers and school PTA members before they are filed in the principal's office.

#### **Other complaints reviewed**

The lunchroom committee also discusses "parent gripes." These reach the committee from food service staff members who refer calls to the members. Occasionally, a referral comes from a principal. Each "griper" is invited to lunch at the school in question. The matter is eventually resolved, usually with Mr. Reile or one of his staff members—food consultants La Verle Billingsley and Allene Beevers.

What committee members find when they visit cafeterias is often a surprise. "When I saw how clean the kitchen was, I thought, 'Wow! I've got to go home and scrub,'" Ms. Plum admitted.

According to PTA council vice-president Nancy Sherman, a former lunchroom committee member, "The children come out the winners. The committee gets answers back to the children."

#### **School lunch explained**

At each year's first lunchroom committee meeting, the food service staff explains the differences between cooking at home for a family and cooking at school for hundreds of students.

When something is underway in school food service, Mr. Reile brings it up at the lunchroom committee meeting. For example, this past school year, he reviewed the effort to eliminate plate waste. And, at the first meeting in the fall, he discussed changes in the Type A lunch pattern.

The director tries to get continuity on the lunchroom committee, and hopes for a "repeater" from each PTA every year.

The work of the PTA lunchroom committee is important to this school district. People long associated with the district feel they still have the "closeness" prevalent in the earlier years when it was a rural three-school district. And one reason is the "open communications" that result from the lunch committee.

"Problem solving is a lot easier through this type of community effort," says John Taylor.

## INVOLVING STUDENTS

"I feel that the most important thing in the minds of the students is change in the lunchroom," said Julie Barfield, a graduating senior at Ft. Walton Beach High School. "Gradually, they will increase their interest in nutrition."

The outgoing chairman of her school's youth advisory council, Julie was one of 109 teenagers and 74 adults attending Florida's first YAC conference in West Palm Beach last spring. The 1-day meeting was sponsored by the Florida School Food Service Association (FSFSA), the Florida Department of Citrus, and the Food and Nutrition Management Section of the Florida Department of Education, and it involved student leaders and adult advisors from all over the State.

#### **Getting student input**

The purpose of youth advisory councils, according to American School Food Service Association guidelines, is to promote school food service programs and nutrition education. And the purpose of the conference, according to its coordinators, Frances Dobbins and Elizabeth Nixon, was to interest students in organizing YAC's and get their input into the lunch program.

The conference started off with speeches, interspersed with entertainment. At midmorning, the adults and students split up for separate meetings, the students dividing into small groups.

In the afternoon, each student group made its recommendations to the full conference. And the following day, the recommendations were presented at Florida School Food Service Association's annual meeting, also held in West Palm Beach.

#### **Suggestions varied**

The students' suggestions ran the gamut—from preparing





special lunches for athletes, to cutting 5 minutes off each class so students could have a regular breakfast period.

Some other recommendations were: prepare enough food for all lunch periods (so the last students that are served don't get hasty substitutions); keep hot foods hot; replace soft-drink machines with fruit juice machines.

Students complained about too much repetition (for instance, too many versions of ground beef) and too many leftovers. They also objected to plastic or wooden eating utensils that were difficult to use, and paper or styrofoam plates or trays that leaked.

There were some comments about attitudes of some lunchroom workers—"they snatch away lunch tickets, or put gravy in the pudding." As to the students' attitudes, they noted that students should show their appreciation when food is good.

Conference participants called for a better atmosphere in the lunchroom—complaining of overcrowding and lack of time. They suggested decorating the cafeteria and playing music during lunch. And they noted that people might keep the cafeteria cleaner if trash cans and racks for trays were placed near exits.

#### **One school's experience**

At the time of the conference, only four Florida schools had established youth advisory councils. Tom Manning, the first chairman of the pilot youth advisory council program at Ft. Walton Beach High School, described

some of his group's efforts.

Ft. Walton's council has accomplished quite a bit since it was organized in the spring of 1975. It has sponsored special events in the cafeteria, such as Foreign Foods Week. For these occasions, they've planned special menus, used colorful trays or plates, and decorated the lunchroom to fit the theme.

The council has taken an active role in menu planning, with council members informally polling their classmates to help determine student food preferences. In addition, YAC members have taste-tested certain foods, like brownies and milkshakes.

When the council noted the problem of overcrowding in the lunchroom, the school established a third lunch period to alleviate the problem. And, to make people outside the school aware of the council, members hosted workshops for county school food service personnel.

#### **Just a beginning**

This conference in West Palm Beach was just the first step in establishing Youth Advisory Councils like Ft. Walton's in schools throughout the State. This, in turn, should make school lunches more acceptable to teenagers—particularly senior high students who are no longer required to accept all five Type A lunch components.

As conference coordinator Elizabeth Nixon explained: "For years, we have made the mistake of talking to our youngsters, instead of listening to them. We now realize we must listen to these youngsters and see what we can do so they will be more than captive customers. We have to have their input and ideas."

## SERVING THE COMMUNITY

The cafeteria got a special red, white and blue decor for a celebration last year at Our Lady of Good Counsel in Cleveland, Ohio. In honor of the American Revolution Bicentennial and the 30th anniversary of the National School Lunch Program, the school invited parents of students and other members of the community to be their luncheon guests.

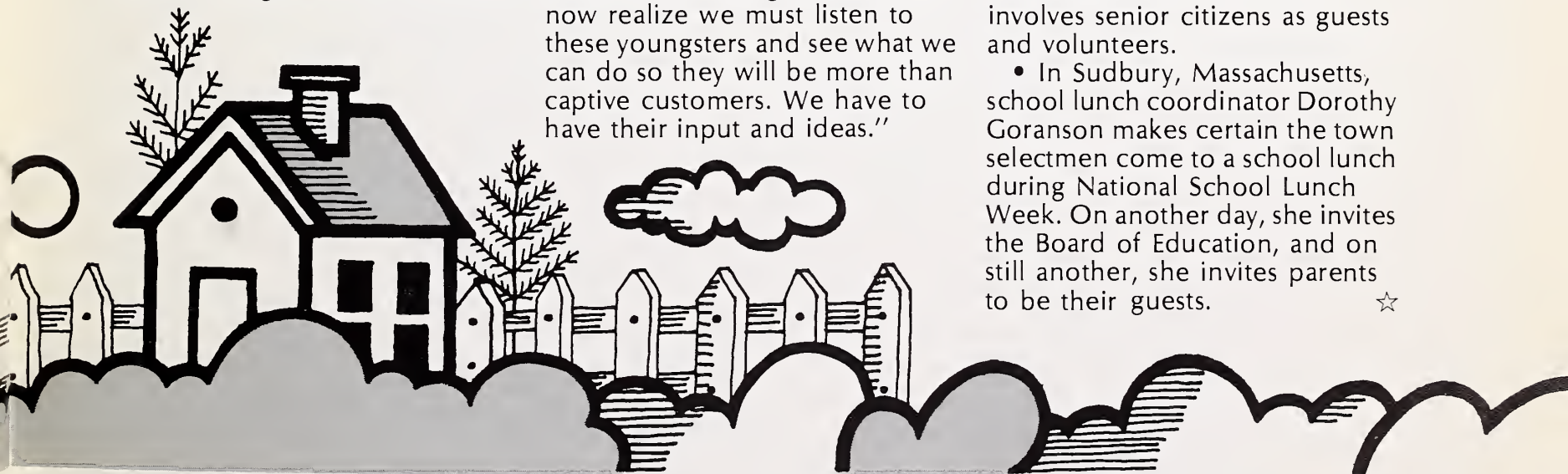
Our Lady of Good Counsel was one of thousands of schools across the country that "invited America to lunch" during the bicentennial year.

Involvement in town activities is an old Yankee custom, and school food service directors in New England often turn their facilities and skills to providing food for town occasions:

- Town meeting in Charlotte, Vermont, is held all day for 1 day each year. All citizens come to discuss issues affecting the town of 1,800 and to cast their votes. School lunch director Ethel Atkins provides a full meal at noon to all who wish to stay, a snack late in the afternoon, and coffee and donuts for the ballot counters.

- In Exeter, New Hampshire, Audrey Eastman arranges fund raising and award dinners for athletic teams as well as for special occasions, like teacher retirement parties. Ms. Eastman often comes up with door prizes donated by local businessman. She also involves senior citizens as guests and volunteers.

- In Sudbury, Massachusetts, school lunch coordinator Dorothy Goranson makes certain the town selectmen come to a school lunch during National School Lunch Week. On another day, she invites the Board of Education, and on still another, she invites parents to be their guests. ☆



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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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